

REMEMBERING THE 1997 WATERTOWN FLOOD

• Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I want to take this opportunity today to recognize the one year anniversary of one of the worst natural disasters to hit Watertown, South Dakota, and the amazing fact that, only one year later, Watertown continues to grow and prosper.

Referred to by South Dakotans simply as "the flood," the events surrounding April 5 and 6, 1997, had the potential to cripple one of the state's fastest growing cities. Instead, battling rising waters and a late season snowstorm, the residents of Watertown, South Dakota, overcame adversity and forged a true community, defined by selfless acts of caring, cooperation, and good will.

Few South Dakotans will forget the winter and spring preceding the April floods. Snowdrifts as high as buildings, roads with only one lane cleared, homes without heat for days, hundreds of thousands of dead livestock, and schools closed for a week at a time were commonplace. As if surviving the severe winter cold was not challenge enough, residents of Watertown could hardly imagine the extent of damage Mother Nature had yet to inflict with a 500-year flood.

Watertown residents could sense the impending flood. The first snow of the season fell in October, and six consecutive months of record-breaking snowfall covered ground that was already saturated from years of unusually wet winters. As the first warm days of spring slowly melted layers of the snowpack, Watertown residents began planning for flooding. Sandbags and earthen berms ringed Lake Kampeska and the Big Sioux River. However, despite careful planning, on April 5, an unexpected blizzard hit the state, devastating the area. Everything froze, creating further concerns about what was going to happen once the water began flowing again.

The unusual weather mix caused water levels to surge in a few hours. RECORD levels on the Big Sioux River and Lake Kampeska forced over 5,000 residents of Watertown, or one-fourth the city's population, to evacuate their homes. Over one-third of the city was without sewer and water for three weeks. The headline of the Watertown Public Opinion on April 6 read "Watertown in Peril," and I will never forget the image of homeowners and neighbors, shrouded in a late-season snow storm, sandbagging against the rising waters of the Big Sioux River and Lake Kampeska.

A number of individuals and organizations in Watertown are responsible for the amazing fact that, despite causing millions of dollars of damage to property, the 1997 flood failed to claim any lives. The work of Mayor Brenda Barger and other community leaders held Watertown together with their strength and direction. The city's ad-hoc crisis center brought together local

and county officials, volunteer agencies including the Red Cross, Salvation Army, Lutheran Social Services, and others, to brainstorm and compile "resource lists" of expected needs including equipment, people, and funds.

Local volunteers, students, prisoners, and National Guard personnel were recruited to first fight the rising waters with sandbags and then help clean-up as the waters receded. In the following days, over 750 port-a-potties were deployed on the lawns of those families who could return to their homes. Water trucks were brought in to provide people with a fresh water supply, and repairs to the damaged water treatment plant were completed ahead of schedule.

While those of us from South Dakota will never forget the destruction wrought by "the flood," I was heartened to witness first-hand and hear accounts of individuals coming together in Watertown to protect homes, farms, and lives from rising flood waters.

Mr. President, April 6 marks the one year anniversary of this terrible natural disaster in Watertown. However, residents of Watertown should look back on April 6, 1997, and be proud of the way they and their neighbors came together and worked side by side to see their community survive. It is this community spirit and pride that will continue to make Watertown "South Dakota's Rising Star."•

TRIBUTE TO THE VERMONT STATE HOUSING AUTHORITY FOR 20 YEARS OF SERVICE

• Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I rise today to congratulate the Vermont State Housing Authority on its 20th Anniversary of providing Vermonters with access to affordable housing.

On March 23, 1968, the Vermont State Housing Authority (VSHA), the nation's first statewide housing authority, was established to ensure that Vermonters have access to affordable housing. Over many years of initiative, dedication, and innovation, the VSHA has aggressively and compassionately pursued opportunities to make housing more accessible and affordable for Vermont's neediest families. I celebrate and extend my congratulations to VSHA.

As a Senator, my highest priorities focus on the essentials for each citizen—economic security, quality education, health care, and meaningful work. We all know that a home is a critical foundation for a successful journey through life. Every year VSHA helps Vermonters build this foundation by providing housing services that reach more than 5,300 families. From mobile home park residents to senior citizens, VSHA serves a wide range of citizens.

Over the years, VSHA has emphasized neighborhood reinvestment initiatives that provide essential supports needed to shape healthy, safe communities so its residents can thrive. The

professionalism, reliability, and accomplishments of the staff at VSHA are unsurpassed. Aware of the needs and hopes of Vermonters, the VSHA staff work tirelessly to preserve and create hopeful environments for Vermonters.

Mr. President, I commend the Vermont State Housing Authority for its outstanding contribution and dedication to improving the quality of life for Vermonters. I am both proud and honored to represent such an accomplished group of individuals here in Washington as they are a national model for how to provide affordable, quality housing opportunities for those in need.

I express my sincerest thanks for VSHA's 20 years of commitment to Vermont and her people. Their continued leadership and drive will continue to ensure that every Vermonter has a place to call home.●

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA CHAPTER 1: TWENTY YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE NATION

• Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I rise today to commend the Vietnam Veterans of America for 20 years of service to veterans and their communities. In particular, I want to recognize the first chapter of the VVA, which was founded in Rutland, Vermont.

If we remember back to the late 1970s, our nation was dealing with the aftermath of a war in which more than 58,000 Americans lost their lives and 2.8 million veterans had served. Many of those veterans were struggling with physical, emotional, and social problems directly related to their service in Vietnam.

Those problems were worsened by the attitude of many Americans who could not separate their opposition to the war from their treatment of our soldiers who had fought it. It was in that spirit that a group of Vietnam veterans from Vermont approached a resourceful young veteran named Bobby Muller. I am proud to say that Bobby Muller has become a close friend of mine and in fact was in Vermont with me just last week. The Vermonters, led by Donny Beaudette and Jake Jacobsen, founded the first chapter of what is now the Vietnam Veterans of America. I remember it well. They were soon joined by other Vermonters like Clark Howland, Mike Dodge, John Bergeron, and others. Together, Chapter One made it their mission to be there for Vermont Vietnam veterans and indeed all veterans.

In the twenty years since then, Chapter One has accomplished that mission, and in the process they have improved the whole Rutland community. They have not only offered assistance to fellow veterans, they have saved the lives of countless troubled veterans who had no where else to turn. Chapter One is responsible for the Dodge Development Center, a veterans center and shelter for homeless veterans which I have